

Here are some things you can do to better care for your yard and garden, while helping to provide a habitat for birds, bees, and other beneficial insects and creatures. Even small efforts made by each of us collectively help to increase the biodiversity and health of our environment. Making these efforts is even more important now as we are losing trees and many small, wild areas to drought and development. It is also very relaxing and satisfying!

- * Provide water for birds and bees. A fountain or bird bath is great, but even a small saucer with pebbles in it, filled with water is an excellent resource for bees and song birds.
- * Cover bare soil and under plants with mulch. Use grass clippings, bark or compost to retain moisture and to protect earthworms and essential microbes in the soil. Many beneficial insects will place their larvae under this ground cover as well.
- * Start a compost pile - it need not be in a fancy bin, it can be a small pile in an out-of-the-way place in the garden. Turning your organic waster into compost helps reduce landfill and green house gases, and gives you 'free' compost for your garden.
- * Start a worm farm to compost your organics. The benefits are the same as above, and worm castings and worm "tea" are a great non-toxic fertilizer for your garden flowers and edibles.
- * Place twig and brush piles in the garden for beneficial insects, toads, and birds to occupy. This too can be tucked away under bushes or in an unused corner of the garden or along a fence base.
- * Place a few Mason Bee houses and Small bird houses in your yard
- * Plant something edible in your yard. I've had great luck with Blueberries and Raspberries, as well as herbs and tomatoes in pots- easy to care for and delicious! Also, it is really fun to pick your own berries, and not have to pay for them at the store.
- * Plant some Native trees that provide homes and food to birds, pollinators, and beneficial insects. Even having a few of these hardworking, drought tolerant plants are a big help. For example: Flowering Currants, Asters, Sunflowers, Wild Buckwheat, Milkweed. Note: There are many others- Nancy Bauer's book "*The Habitat Garden Book*" from Coyote Press is an inexpensive, excellent resource. ISBN 978-0-9707445-1-7
- * Do not use fertilizers or pesticides in the garden. Many of these claim to be non-toxic, but can in fact be harmful to pets and bees. Once plants which attract beneficial insects are established, you may be amazed at the difference it makes in your garden, and your neighbors' gardens as well! I was certainly surprised when I noticed that I no longer have aphids on my plants, and butterflies, bees, and lady bugs are plentiful in my garden. My neighbors have many Native plants also and this might contribute as well. I do not use

any sprays or poisons in my garden, and I encourage my neighbors to do the same for the sake of ourselves and our pets, as well as the environment.

Go to www.gardeningknowhow.com for more ideas, how to compost, and resources. There is also an interesting article "*Antidepressant Microbes In Soil: How Dirt Makes You Happy*"

Do you have any tips to share? If so, please let me know.